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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"*****"

I feel like I'm starting to sound like a broken record! This has been another bad week. Life on the job just won't get any better. I'm even seeing it in the faces of some of my peers, so it isn't just me! I can usually handle routine stress fairly well, but this constant stuff can really drain a person.

And to top it off, I was getting close to catching up with this week's issue when the Falcon started acting up again. What I've been using for my "stable" hard drive is a Syquest 44 drive that I've had in a tower case for many years now. The CD drive, hard drives in the tower, and now the external hard drive are dead. The Syquest booted fine today, but then when I tried running some software and I kept getting read errors. After I re-booted the drive and Falcon a few times, I was working again. I guess I had better back up the cartridge and hope it's not the drive itself that is starting to fail! And before everything else starts to crap out, I better end this diatribe now and get this week's issue out the door!

Until next time...

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MPC STiK 1.6a

MPC STiK is a network bridge for STiK API network clients under MagicPC. Run Highwire, Chat in AtarIcq or AtarIRC all while running MagicPC. The program uses the underlying windows network for all communications.

The website isn't beautiful, but I have included a short list of tested clients. Some clients are problematic, but enough functionality is there for regular use.

<http://baldrick.gemcandy.org/mpcstik.htm>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and we now find ourselves right smack-dab in the middle of winter. Mother Nature is due to whack us with another storm over the weekend here in the northeast, and I guess we really can't complain too much, since it's been fairly mild so far.

On another front, this week Coretta Scott King was laid to rest. I'm sure that you've heard just about all the details about all the news-bits... who, what, when, where, why and how... but all of that still leaves something out.

I was almost eight years old when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. It seemed a world away to me back then. A far-away place called Alabama, a struggle of some sort called "civil rights", and a very brutal end.

But this isn't about Dr. Martin Luther King. Well, not exactly, anyway. It's about his wife, Coretta. She spent the lion's share of her life AFTER she lost her husband. Even now, that bends my mind. She went on to become, as several luminaries have said, the first lady of the civil rights movement.

That's fine, and even remarkable, but it's important to remember that her journey was not an easy one, nor was it a short one. I can almost guarantee you that it's not the path that she would have chosen for her self all those years ago while attending the New England Conservatory.

But, as is the case with all of us, it's not so much what she chose that defines her, but how she dealt with the things that she didn't get to choose. And she didn't just make due with what she'd been dealt. She didn't just muddle through. She turned negatives into positives, she turned personal tragedies into public triumphs, she took the hand that she'd been dealt and turned it into something that enriched the world. From that far-away place called Alabama to an even farther-away place called South Africa, she stood as a model to all of us and a shining example of what we can do when we must... when we choose... to stand up, rather than just stand out. Her family and all those whom she touched throughout her life... and that includes people like myself who not only never met her, but seldom thought of her except when she was in the eye of the media... should be grateful that she graced us with her presence and her good works.

It's going to be a short column this week. There were a grand total of 28 new messages in the newsgroup this week.

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Lonny Pursell posts:

"GFA-Basic Compiler v3.6 package translated to French.
Includes 2 versions in the archive:
Original version as it would have been had GFA ever released it.
A pre-patched version for use with GBE/MiNT and MagiC.
<http://www.bright.net/~gfabasic/> "

'Phantom' tells us that he...

"Recently got a bunch of ST Books.
Some are filled with programs in ST Basic.
I was wondering if old ST Basic programs are compatible in GFA Basic?"

Lonny Pursell tells Phantom:

"Nope, ST basic uses line numbers, gfa does not. It would need to be
recoded."

Mickael Pointier adds:

"From what I remember there was a converter able to read ST Basic
listings and output .lst files.

Was not entirely compatible, but at least it took care of line numbers
and stuff."

Dan Iacovelli posts this about The Video Game Summit Slogan Contest:

"Atari Video Club needs your help making a new slogan for
this years show. So we decided to make a contest out of it.
The winning slogan will be featured on selected items in
our store cafepress.com The person with the winning slogan will
also win a white t-shirt that has the slogan on the back of
the shirt and our new Logo on the front.

Here are the rules:

- 1) slogans are to be original and not a parody of known
slogans.
- 2) slogans must either include the words "Video Games", "Computers"
and "Family fun" or at least reference to the words.
- 3) there's a limit of three slogans per person
- 4) Contest is open to everyone!!
- 5) deadline for entries in June 2nd, the winning slogan will
be announced on June 13th.

E-mail your contest submissions to the e-mail address listed below

with the subject: Slogan contest.

The 2006 Video Game Summit is on August 12th, 2006 from 9am to 6pm at the Fairfield inn and Suites (Heron point building), 645 West North Ave, Lombard, IL 60148.

Visit the VGS website: <http://avc.atari-users.net/VGS.html>

For more information about Video Game Summit
contact Daniel Iacovelli at AtariVideoClub@yahoo.com "

'Knight37' pops in with a couple of examples:

"ATARI - We Once Were Synonymous With Video Games Until We Let Nintendo Steal It From Us.

ATARI - Because Infogrames Was a Stupid Ass Name.

Oops. Not sure that 2nd one will qualify. It's a good one though."

'Larry' joins the game and adds:

"The first ones are really tongue in cheek:

"ATARI - Your Father's Video Game System"

"Atari - Family fun from sometime between caveman and XBox"

"Atari: #4 of the Big Three Computer Companies"
(back when it was Radio Shack, Commodore, Apple and Atari)

Now for some better ones:

[VCS 2600 graphic]
Atari 2600
XX Million Happy Customers
(I'm sure someone here has the number sold)

Atari Computers
[Atari 800 graphic]
Four Players - No Waiting!

(Line art of the old ad showing a family playing a 2600)
Atari - Fun for the Whole Family!"

Guillaume Tello asks about processors for the MegaSTE:

"I have a Mega STE, and, before opening it, i'd like to know if I can plug in it the following processors:

- un MC 68020 RC16B (2A70N8807)
- un MC 68881 RC16B (2B 81G QEXX8834)

Without soldering, of course....!!!"

"I don't know about the no soldering part, but from info I found online, the Mega STE was supposed to have had an optional 68881 coprocessor, which means there should be a spot for one somewhere on the motherboard. If it's like the Falcon, you just need to buy the 68881/68882 and pop it in (making sure it's lined up properly, of course). Also, I've heard that you could use a PAK 030 accelerator. That would give you a 68030 running at up to 40MHz. There was also Veloce, I think. You'd definitely need soldering with these, though. Of course, then there's the issue of finding them! Good luck!"

"No, you can't do that, even soldering would not help."

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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"EA is the premiere sports videogame developer and we're thrilled to have worked with them on this project," said Glenn Horine, President, AFL Properties. "EA SPORTS Arena Football captures the passion of our sport and

gives fans an opportunity to experience the action for themselves."

"The AFL was an amazing league to work with and we strived to create a game that accurately depicts their unique brand of football," said Mike Taramykin, Senior Producer, EA Tiburon. "Arena Football has features that will appeal to both AFL fans and sports fans alike."

The all-new Be the Receiver feature allows players to take control of their receiver right from the snap and create routes on the fly, attempting to mix up the defense for a big score. With the new in-game Telemetry system, players can get real-time information such as scoring history, passing tendencies and player health and fatigue levels, allowing them to capitalize on their opponent's weaknesses.

In Franchise Mode, players can take their favorite AFL team and build them into a powerhouse by managing depth charts, signing free agents and making trades in an attempt to take home the ArenaBowl championship. Arena Football also allows players to create their own team or choose from more than 30 unlockable historic teams including the Anaheim Piranhas and Iowa Barnstormers.

Developed in Orlando, FL by EA Tiburon, Arena Football is available for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system and the Xbox video game system from Microsoft. The game is rated "E10+" (Everyone 10 and older) with descriptors: Language, Mild Violence, Suggestive Themes, by the ESRB and has an MSRP of \$29.99 for both console versions. The game's official website is <http://www.easportsarena.com>.

'Resident Evil 4' Video Game of the Year-1UP Awards

Capcom's "Resident Evil 4" picked up awards for video game of the year and best action video game at Ziff Davis Media Game Group's annual 1UP Awards held in San Francisco on Wednesday.

A list of winners follows:

Game of the year: "Resident Evil 4" (Capcom)

Best action game: "Resident Evil 4" (Capcom)

Best adventure game: "Shadow of the Colossus" (Sony Computer Entertainment)

Best fighting/wrestling game: "Soul Calibur III" (Namco)

Best "massively multiplayer" game: "Guild Wars" (NCsoft)

Best online/multiplayer game: "Battlefield 2" (Electronic Arts)

Best puzzle game: "Lumines" (Ubisoft)

Best racing game: "Mario Kart DS" (Nintendo)

Best role-playing game: "Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King" (Square Enix)

Best shooter game: "Call of Duty 2" (Activision)

Most innovative game: "Nintendogs" (Nintendo)

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->A-ONE Gaming Online      -          Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Video Game Summit Slogan Contest

For Immediate Release:
2/7/2006

Atari Video Club needs your help making a new slogan for this years show. So we decided to make a contest out of it. The winning slogan will be featured on selected items in our store cafepress.com The person with the winning slogan will also win a white t-shirt that has the slogan on the back of the shirt and our new Logo on the front.

Here are the rules:

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For more information about Video Game Summit
contact Daniel Iacovelli at AtariVideoC...@yahoo.com

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U.S. Concludes 'Cyber Storm' Mock Attacks

The government concluded its "Cyber Storm" wargame Friday, its biggest-ever exercise to test how it would respond to devastating attacks over the Internet from anti-globalization activists, underground hackers and bloggers.

Participants confirmed parts of the worldwide simulation challenged government officials and industry executives to respond to deliberate misinformation campaigns and activist calls by Internet bloggers, online diarists whose "Web logs" include political rantings and musings about current events.

The Internet survived, even against fictional abuses against the world's computers on a scale typical for Fox's popular "24" television series. Experts depicted hackers who shut down electricity in 10 states, failures in vital systems for online banking and retail sales, infected discs mistakenly distributed by commercial software companies and critical flaws discovered in core Internet technology.

Some mock attacks were aimed at causing a "significant cyber disruption" that could seriously damage energy, transportation and health care industries and undermine public confidence, said George Foresman, an undersecretary at the Homeland Security Department.

There was no impact on the real Internet during the weeklong exercise. Government officials from the United States, Canada, Australia and England and executives from Microsoft, Cisco, Verisign and others said they were careful to simulate attacks only using isolated computers, working from basement offices at the Secret Services headquarters in downtown Washington.

The Homeland Security Department promised a full report on results from the exercise by summer.

Foresman likened his agency's role during any Internet attack to an orchestra conductor, coordinating responses from law enforcement, intelligence agencies, the military and private firms. The government's goal is a "symphony of preparedness," Foresman said.

Homeland Security coordinated the exercise. More than 115 government agencies, companies and organizations participated. They included the White House National Security Council, Justice Department, Defense Department, State Department, National Security Agency and CIA, which conducted its own cybersecurity exercise called "Silent Horizon" last May.

An earlier cyberterrorism exercise called "Livewire" for Homeland Security and other federal agencies concluded there were serious questions over government's role during a cyberattack depending on who was identified as the culprit - terrorists, a foreign government or bored teenagers.

It also questioned whether the U.S. government would be able to detect the early stages of such an attack without significant help from private technology companies.

Broadband, Content Firms Fight Over Net Neutrality

High-speed Internet providers and Internet content companies clashed before lawmakers on Tuesday, in a dispute over whether a law enshrining the right to surf anywhere on the Web would help or harm consumers.

Representatives of local telephone and cable companies that offer fast Internet access, known as broadband, said passing a new law could stymie innovation while companies like Google Inc. said that could happen without legislation.

Broadband providers have largely pledged that consumers will be able to access any Internet site. But some also said they may charge more for services that use faster private Internet networks, like downloading movies.

"Regulatory or legislative solutions wholly without justification in marketplace activities would stifle, not enhance the Internet," Walter McCormick, head of the U.S. Telecom Association, told the Senate Commerce Committee.

Yet companies like Web search engine Google and Internet telephone provider Vonage Holdings Corp. argued that a private fast Internet lane could not only block users from accessing their content and services, but also squash innovation.

"We must preserve neutrality in this system in order to allow new Googles of the world, new Yahoos, the new Amazons, to form," said Vinton Cerf, a Google vice president who in previous jobs helped develop the Internet.

"We risk losing the Internet as a catalyst for consumer choice, for economic growth, for technological innovation and for global competitiveness," Cerf said.

In the middle were lawmakers who were divided and uncertain about whether they should act. Republicans and Democrats both expressed support for unfettered Internet surfing, but a few Republicans cautioned about legislating too quickly.

Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Stevens said after the hearing he would like to embrace some form of Internet neutrality, but noted that it was difficult to define and get consensus.

"I think first we have to define what it is," the Alaska Republican said, according to a transcript of his remarks provided by his office. "I do believe that net neutrality ought to be the basic principle of whatever legislation we pursue."

Sen. John Ensign, who has offered legislation to revise U.S. communications laws, questioned whether such provisions would cut incentives for companies to build out their networks and compete.

"You do deserve a return on your investment is the bottom line if you're going to build out these networks," the Nevada Republican said. "Otherwise, if you can't give them the return on their investment, Wall Street is not going to loan them the money to do this."

But Democrats on the panel countered that consumers are already paying for

content and broadband access.

"It is not a free lunch for any one of these content providers," said Sen. Byron Dorgan, a North Dakota Democrat. "I've already paid the monthly toll" to go to any Internet site.

Analysts have been skeptical that Congress will act this year on the issue.

"Details are devilish, suggesting differences would have to be bridged with broad and possibly ambiguous mandates that invite regulatory and court battles," said an analyst report by Stifel Nicolaus released on Tuesday. "And even then, legislation could easily stall."

Activists Claim Yahoo Again Helped China

Yahoo Inc. has provided Chinese authorities with information used to jail one of its users for eight years, an activist group said Thursday - the second time the U.S.-based Internet firm was accused of helping jail a Chinese user.

Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said Yahoo's Hong Kong unit provided information about Li Zhi, a man from southwestern China who was sentenced to prison in 2003 for subversion after posting comments online criticizing official corruption.

Mary Osako, a spokeswoman for Sunnyvale, Calif.-based Yahoo, said the company didn't know of the case and couldn't comment on whether the group's account was accurate.

However, Osako said Yahoo Hong Kong would not have had access to Li's Chinese account - and it never releases information to the Chinese government.

She said the company was investigating whether Yahoo China, run by a partner company, released the data.

Meanwhile, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists called for Yahoo to disclose information on Internet writers whose identities it has revealed to Chinese authorities.

"We are disturbed that Yahoo has once again provided account holder information that has been used to jail an Internet writer," said CPJ Executive Director Ann Cooper. "We call on Yahoo to make a complete public disclosure of how many such requests it has received."

The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations has scheduled a hearing Wednesday on ethical responsibilities of companies doing business in China.

Activists criticized Yahoo last year after it was disclosed that the company provided information that Chinese authorities used to convict and jail reporter Shi Tao for revealing state secrets.

"Now we know Yahoo works regularly and efficiently with the Chinese police," a Reporters Without Borders statement said.

It urged Internet companies to use U.S.-based servers in "repressive

countries" so governments must comply with American law when getting information on users.

Osako said that when the company receives government subpoenas, it isn't usually told how information will be used. Only legally required information is turned over, she said.

"The choice in China and other countries is not whether to comply with law enforcement demands for information," Osako said. "Rather, the choice is whether to remain in the country."

Yahoo was "distressed" when it learned of the facts surrounding the Shi Tao case, she said.

In that case, Chinese authorities demanded information from Yahoo's China unit, which complied with Chinese law, Osako said.

She said earlier accounts saying the information was supplied to Chinese authorities by Yahoo's Hong Kong arm were incorrect.

Google Inc. and Microsoft Corp. also have been criticized for enforcing Chinese censorship guidelines.

Google's China-based service limits online searches for sensitive topics, and Microsoft shut down a Chinese user's Web log upon officials' demand.

Yahoo formed a partnership in October with China's Alibaba.com, which runs Yahoo's mainland China operations.

An Alibaba spokesman, Porter Erisman, said Thursday the company had no information about the 2003 case because it occurred before the partnership.

Its chief executive, Jack Ma, said earlier his company would cooperate with authorities seeking information on "politically sensitive information" sent by a Yahoo e-mail customer.

Yahoo, AOL to Charge Some E-Mail Senders

Two of the world's biggest e-mail account providers, Yahoo Inc. and America Online, plan to introduce a service that would charge senders a fee to route their e-mail directly to a user's mailbox without first passing through junk mail filters, representatives of both companies said Sunday.

The fees, which would range from 1/4 cent to 1 cent per e-mail, are the latest attempts by the companies to weed out unsolicited ads, commonly called spam, and identity-theft scams. In exchange for paying, e-mail senders will be guaranteed their messages won't be filtered and will bear a seal alerting recipients they're legitimate.

Both companies have long filtered e-mail by searching for keywords commonly contained in spam and fraudulent e-mail. AOL also strips images and Web links from many messages to prevent the display of pornographic pictures and malicious Web addresses. Both practices sometimes falsely identify legitimate messages as junk mail, making life difficult for businesses that rely on e-mail.

"We were hearing not only from members but also e-mail partners that they

wanted a different way of delivering e-mail that would stand out in the inbox and would guarantee them delivery," said spokesman Nicholas Graham, adding that AOL, a division of New York-based Time Warner Inc., will start offering the service in the next two months.

Company spokeswoman Karen Mahon said Sunday Sunnyvale-based Yahoo will begin offering a similar service in the coming months.

The plan, while it's optional and would apply to only a fraction of people sending e-mail, amounts to a reversal in the economics of the Internet because it would charge message senders rather than those receiving them. The current model has led to the proliferation of spam and so-called phishing scams because the people perpetuating them can turn a profit even when only a minority of recipients respond, analysts have said.

AOL and Yahoo said the program, which is being offered through a company called Goodmail Systems, will target banks, online retailers and other groups that send large amounts of e-mail. In exchange for a payment and a pledge to contact only people who have agreed to receive their messages, the companies would be ensured their e-mails aren't diverted to spam folders or have images or Web addresses filtered out.

The companies also would receive reports showing how many e-mails were received successfully. The American Red Cross, the New York Times Co. and credit report company Experian have signed up with Goodmail to use the service, Graham said. AOL and Yahoo would get a cut of the fees charged by Goodmail.

Companies that don't want to pay a fee will be able to send e-mail to Yahoo and AOL members exactly as they have in the past, Graham and Mahon said.

Microsoft May Rebrand MSN Portal

Microsoft may be getting ready to rebrand its MSN site as MSN Media Network, according to the blog Liveside.Net and an internal Microsoft Web site.

The LiveSide.net blog reported on the name change Monday, citing several unnamed sources for the information. One of the blog's authors, Chris Overd, said via e-mail on Monday that those sources are Microsoft employees.

The rebranding will coincide with the launch of expanded MSN services for downloading digital media content and is aimed at expanding MSN into more of a digital entertainment content provider, he wrote. Currently, MSN is a Web portal for providing news and video content, as well as services such as music downloading and e-mail.

A Microsoft Web site showcasing Gadgets, or mini-applications for MSN's Windows Live service, also refers to the portal as "MSN Media Network."

The page is a sub-site under the official company site for the mini-applications, which Microsoft calls "Gadgets." The featured Gadget, called the MSN Homepage Slideshow, provides a rotating slideshow of multimedia images and headlines from MSN. According to the site where it appears, which is a public discussion forum about Gadgets, the application was created by a developer in the Microsoft Gadgets Lab, an internal

company group.

A Microsoft spokesman from Waggener Edstrom, the company's public relations firm, said Monday he could not confirm or deny the report of the rebranding plan.

Some of the new services MSN Media Network plans to deliver, according to LiveSide.net's Overd, are video services through MSN Video, such as movie and television downloads, as well as a podcasting service.

The authors of LiveSide.net are all Microsoft-dedicated beta testers or Most Valuable Professionals (MVPs), he said. MVP is an award the company gives to people who are active and helpful in communities for Microsoft's product groups.

Microsoft launched Windows Live and Microsoft Gadgets late last year as part of a comprehensive strategy to offer more Web-based services through its MSN division and portal.

Windows Live is in beta testing and provides a hub for e-mail and other customized Web-based content and services. At the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January, MSN spokesman Adam Sohn said Microsoft plans to give users more access to multimedia content through Windows Live by enabling them to communicate with Internet-connected Windows PCs directly through the online service to download movies and record television programming remotely.

Since the official launch of its Web-based services strategy, Microsoft has made significant investments to compete with a host of industry heavyweights that are in the process of offering more multimedia content over the Web, including Apple Computer, Google, Yahoo, and America Online. Microsoft recently launched Live Labs, an internal research effort to help get Web-based services developed and out the door quickly, and it plans to host its first-ever trade show for Web and multimedia content developers, MIX 06, in Las Vegas next month.

Microsoft to Unveil Paid Security Service

A new security service from Microsoft Corp. will charge users \$49.95 per year to better protect its Windows operating system from spyware, viruses and other Internet attacks.

Microsoft plans to release the product in early June.

Called Windows OneCare Live, the subscription service will compete with security products made by traditional Microsoft partners, including Symantec Corp. and McAfee Inc. - although the software giant insists that its aim is not to run those companies out of business.

Ryan Hamlin, general manager of Microsoft's Technology Care and Safety Group, said Microsoft is less concerned with converting people already using other products. Instead, Hamlin says Microsoft's goal is to provide protection for users who don't have any added or up-to-date security - a group that Microsoft estimates comprises 70 percent of consumer users.

"There's plenty of room here, kind of, for all of us," Hamlin said.

OneCare, which is already available for free in test form, aims to protect people running the most recent version of Windows against Internet attacks and intrusive spyware. It also promises to provide regular tuneups to help keep computers running smoothly, and offers users a way to back up and restore data.

The system will automatically update with the latest protections and occasionally add new features, Hamlin said.

Microsoft, whose Windows operating system and Internet Explorer browser are constant targets of worms, viruses and other disruptive attacks, announced more than a year ago that it would offer the paid service. Hamlin said nearly 200,000 people are already trying it out. Anyone who signs up for the test by April 30 can buy the paid service for just \$19.95 per year.

The subscription fee is for up to three personal computers.

The service will initially be available only in English, although Hamlin said the company expects to launch test versions elsewhere in the world over the next 12 months.

Analyst Ted Schadler with Forrester Research said the \$49.95 price tag is about even, if not slightly cheaper, than rival offerings, although clear comparisons are difficult to make.

He said it makes sense for the maker of the world's dominant computer operating system to have a product that better protects its customers, but he questioned whether Microsoft would have any more luck than its competitors in persuading more people to safeguard their systems.

"The big opportunity is to get to people who don't have any security," he said, but "Microsoft doesn't have any better way to get to those people than anybody else."

eBay Evolving Away From Auction Roots

eBay is fast moving away from its roots as an online auction site and becoming an electronic-commerce site, president and CEO Meg Whitman said today at a press conference here.

More than a third of sales on eBay sites are bought instantly at fixed prices rather than through the online auctions that established its reputation, she said. "Globally, 34 percent of the gross merchandise value of sales are settled through the 'Buy It Now' fixed price format," she told journalists. The total value of sales on eBay was more than \$10 billion over the last three quarters.

The trend in sales is driven by the need to satisfy "convenience-orientated buyers" who do not want to wait for the end of an auction period to see if they had bought an item or who do not want to run the risk of losing the item, Whitman said. She highlighted eBay's plans to launch a new service called eBay Express that would further encourage the trend by collecting all items for sale at fixed prices in one place.

Commenting on the recent decision by U.S. jeweler Tiffany to sue eBay for failing to take adequate steps to prevent fake Tiffany items from being offered on its site, Whitman said eBay had been "disappointed" by the move

as the company worked with intellectual property holders to combat the sale of fake goods. "Counterfeit items are not allowed [on our sites]," she said, adding that eBay has focused on the problem of fake items. "We have a number of technical tools to help intellectual property owners identify goods and remove them," she said.

Having customers maintain trust in the eBay service is crucial, she said. The number of transactions resulting in disputes is "less than one hundredth of 1 percent" and is falling, she said. But the company wants to further reduce that figure. "We will invest in activities to fight the bad guys," she said. Whitman pointed out that the company helps mediate disputes, with customer support representatives getting involved in cases.

Commenting on eBay's acquisition of Internet phone company Skype, Whitman said that the purchase will help raise the average value of transactions by allowing buyers and sellers to communicate more easily. The more information buyers and sellers have about each other, the more likely they are to carry out higher-value transactions like buying cars, she explained. In any case, Whitman said Skype has 75 million users and is attracting 200,000 new members a day. eBay will be adding Skype buttons to its sites in the Netherlands, Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan, she said.

However, she ruled out further major acquisitions in 2006, saying that this is a year to "integrate and digest" companies eBay has bought, "making sure we exploit the synergies."

She predicted that eBay faces increasing competition from Google and its PayPal online payment service.

Microsoft Faces First EU Antitrust Fines

Microsoft looks more than likely to earn a place in history by becoming the first company to be hit with daily fines by the European Union for failing to respect an antitrust ruling. The EU's highest antitrust official, Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes, has given the company until February 15 to comply with the commission's March 2004 ruling or face a fine of up to \$2.4 million a day.

Events of recent weeks indicate that the company will not meet the commission's demands by that date, so the procedure will be launched to impose daily penalties. This view is shared not just by Microsoft's rivals and complainants in the case, but also independent analysts.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised if the EU went ahead and fined Microsoft," said Gary Barnett, an analyst covering the company at Ovum in the UK.

The key issue is whether Microsoft has done enough to ensure interoperability with its workgroup server software, one of the three elements of the commission's 2004 ruling. The company argues it has gone far beyond what the commission is asking for by offering to open access to the source code for the communications protocols.

"We have done everything we can to respond to the commission's changing demands, even going beyond the decision," a company spokesperson said.

Yet, the commission and Microsoft's rivals have dismissed the company's offer, saying that granting access to the source code does not meet the

fundamental challenge of enabling other developers to create products that interoperate smoothly with Microsoft's server software.

"Software companies know how to write interface specifications [to ensure interoperability with other companies' products]. They do it all the time and so does Microsoft. But they're not doing it here because they don't want to," said Thomas Vinje, a lawyer at Clifford Chance who represents rival software companies supporting the case against Microsoft.

Microsoft also argues that the commission has not given the company enough time to respond to its complaints and is denying it the information it needs to answer the commission's charges in the statement of objections sent on December 22. "It has been six weeks since we received the statement of objections, we have eight days left to respond, and we still do not have access to the case file. This is a basic question of fairness and transparency," a spokesperson said.

But analysts are equally skeptical about Microsoft's tactics in leaking a letter accusing the commission of withholding access to key documents. "The letter is part of a strategy to prolong things," said Ovum's Barnett.

Judging by recent developments, the company seems to prefer to make its case against the commission through the media rather than making serious efforts to change Kroes' mind on the merits of the case. Microsoft faxed the commissioner a two-page fax on the source code offer only 10 minutes before the company's top lawyer Brad Smith announced the offer to the press. The commissioner says she is still waiting for more details from the company.

In the absence of a sudden U-turn by Microsoft to offer usable documentation that would allow its rivals to develop interoperable products, it seems that the company will be the first to be fined for noncompliance. Sources close to Kroes say she has run out of time and patience with the company after an eight-year investigation and giving the company more than a year to comply.

The fine is likely to be less than the \$2.4 million figure circulating, as the commission will not go for the maximum fine the first time. A figure of \$1.2 million a day or less is seen as more likely. Microsoft is likely to appeal a fine.

Microsoft can afford to pay the fine and would get its money back with interest if it won an appeal to the European Court of Justice regarding the antitrust ruling and any financial penalty that is imposed. It would hurt the company more to be the first to suffer financial penalties for not respecting a commission decision, but Microsoft may have decided that noncompliance and a fine are a smaller price to pay than allowing competitors to develop rival products.

Spyware Threats Tripled in 2005

Last year was the biggest year yet for spyware, as consumers, small businesses, and enterprises across the globe were invaded by a plague of malicious software.

Trojan horses and system monitors were the most malicious types of spyware unleashed on computers, says Boulder, Colorado-based software vendor

Webroot in a new report called "The State of Spyware."

Antivirus programs and free antispymware solutions are ineffective against these complicated and sophisticated programs, Webroot concluded.

The detection-and-removal engines used by these programs are unable to root out these insidious programs, which use polymorphic code and rootkit technology to avoid detection.

Between the third and fourth quarters of 2005, the number of Trojan infections in enterprises computers increased by 9 percent, according to Webroot. From the second to the fourth quarter of 2005, the number of system monitors, such as keystroke loggers, increased by 50 percent consecutively each quarter.

In addition, Webroot found that spyware-triggered business disruptions caused significant revenue loss for 54 percent of businesses.

"Webroot's report confirms everything we've heard about the threat of spyware," said Andrew Jaquith, a senior analyst at the Yankee Group.

"It's troubling that a significant number of Windows PCs, both consumer and corporate, continue to be infected with genuinely malicious code, such as rootkits, keyloggers, and Trojan horses."

Jaquith also said that Webroot's numbers show that the botnet epidemic will not run out of fuel any time soon. Botnets are networks of computers that are taken over by criminals without the consent of their owners. Botnets are used to attack other computers or to send out spam.

"There is no doubt that, as Microsoft and other vendors continue to improve the security of their base operating systems, malicious code writers will 'move up the stack' and target applications," said Neil MacDonald, Gartner Research vice president and distinguished analyst of information security, privacy, and risk.

"The fact that Internet Explorer is so widely deployed makes it a prime target," said MacDonald. "This, combined with the 'social engineering' aspect of these attacks - tricking the users into installing or clicking on something they shouldn't - means the browser will continue to be a focal point of attack."

MacDonald also said that all consumers and enterprise I.T. users should have some form of antispymware protection installed and should demand this capability at no cost from their incumbent antivirus providers.

"If that fails, Microsoft's antispymware beta is in wide use and provides good protection at no cost - and will be bundled in Windows Vista," MacDonald said.

"Another important step will be to deploy Internet Explorer 7 when it becomes available, as Microsoft has reengineered Internet Explorer to provide less exposure to spyware attacks, especially on Windows Vista where most browsing activities will be performed without administrative access," MacDonald said.

Richard Stiennon, vice president of threat research at Webroot, disagreed with the suggestion to use Internet Explorer.

"Even though Microsoft will block a lot of vulnerabilities in Internet

Explorer, IE7 is likely to have a whole load more vulnerabilities," he said. "Users should switch instead to Firefox from Mozilla, which has no proven vulnerabilities."

Europe Is Urged to Improve Web Security

Europe must work harder to make the Internet more secure as the nature of online threats becomes increasingly criminal across the 25-nation bloc, a senior EU official warned Thursday.

"We are still far from achieving the goal of secure and reliable networks that protect confidential and reliable information," said Viviane Reding, the EU's media commissioner, at a conference on trust in the Internet.

"A couple of years ago, most Internet security problems were caused by viruses and worms often created by hackers ... Today, however, the threat landscape is changing. Attacks have a criminal base, such as identity theft."

Almost 80 percent of EU citizens are concerned about Internet security and half do not engage in electronic commerce because they worry about having their personal financial data stolen on the Web, she said.

Spam - unsolicited messages that clog up e-mail inboxes - also continues to be a menace and is often used to steal passwords and credit card numbers and spread spyware, Reding said, adding that 60 percent of e-mails in 2005 were spam.

Speaking via video link from Brussels, Reding stressed the importance of international cooperation in promoting user trust in the Web and said she would soon announce a "strategy for enhanced security."

Reding's comments were echoed by Alun Micheal, Britain's minister of state for industry and the regions.

"We must aim to provide citizen security on the Internet, prevent exclusion and reduce fear," Micheal said.

But he warned that too much security could do more harm than good.

"Approach a security expert of a policeman and you may well get a solution that stunts the creativity or prevents basic use of your home or your factory or your computer," he said, adding that the response had to be light, fast, proportionate and effective.

In the end, all attempts to secure cyberspace will fail if users, already weary of online fraud, change their mind-set and become comfortable using new technology, he said.

"Trusting the Net also requires changes in attitudes and that is what will make a real difference to overcoming fear and protecting the vulnerable," he said.

Building trust, however, takes time and is based on positive experiences.

Austria has since 2003 slowly adapted to an electronic tax filing system. After initial skepticism, the system is now up and running with some

success based in part on high confidence in public administration, said Alfred Finz, state secretary in Austria's Finance Ministry.

In that sense, trust in the Internet is vital for the future of electronic services, he added.

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